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BOOKS

# A thriller of the new school to make you pale

By Gary Houston

"The Spook Who Sat By the Door" (Baron, \$4.95) is a thriller, but not of the old school. It concerns Dan Freeman, a black man who takes a leave of absence from his gang-leader life in Chicago to invest a few years as a trainee in the CIA. He pretends to aspire towards intelligence work as a career, but his real one-man mission is to learn the tricks of the trade, bring his knowledge back with him to the South and West Side Chicago ghettos and organize a black guerrilla army which will seize the centers of power in eight major northern U.S. metropolises.

If the idea makes you pale, you are probably pale to begin with. In a recent interview, Sam Greenlee said that his novel is for black readers—intended to be, without apologies to whites, somewhat inspirational, in fact.

Greenlee's background has various threads of experience which he has woven into the fabric of his first novel. His parents moved from the Deep South to Chicago, where he plowed through a slum education. He was accepted at the University of Wisconsin, but he transferred to the University of Chicago, where he studied with Hans Morgenthau. Later, he attended the University of Salonica, in Greece, where he studied ancient Greek history.

AS A MEMBER OF the United States Information Service, he spent time in Iraq, Pakistan, as well as in Greece as a "cultural officer." During the 1958 military coup in Iraq led by Brigadier Abdul Karim Kassem—a coup which precipitated mob violence throughout Baghdad, where Greenlee lived—Greenlee risked his life when he crossed the Tigris River and rescued a besieged family. For this he was given the Meritorious Service Award.

In the USIS, his encounters with CIA personnel were frequent, and he noticed that CIA men appear by their deportment to be in "that Humphrey Bogart bag." Too busy playing Commie-hunting cloak-and-dagger games, these white intelligence men appeared to be cardboard characters—and in that light they and most other whites have been accurately exposed to "The Spook Who Sat By the Door."

THE WHITE Anglo-Saxon Protestants," says Greenlee, "are a minority which have shrewdly kept the power to themselves." In his view, Wasps may not exercise racism in everyday, man-to-man encounters, but they use the racism of others (e.g., of the blue-collar, white "ethnic" lower middle

and working class) to keep the blacks down. The blacks have no choice but to fight, and they can't depend at all upon the young white leftists.

"It isn't a matter of asking who's going to win or lose," Greenlee says, in reference to the hypothetical race war. "The point is to show that this is what's going to happen if black people don't get what they need from this society."

Pushing 40 and with white hairs at the chin of his beard, Greenlee is somewhat of a father-figure in the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) Writers' Workshop, 77th E. 35th St. "It's good to be back in the ghetto again. I find the younger writers dig Coltrane, but my riffs come from Lester Young, Charlie Parker, old-timers like that. These kids are still writing verse, and they don't seem to be attracted by the novel as a literary form."

"Whitey says we're nonverbal," says protagonist Freeman to Willie, a young light-skinned gang member, in the novel. "Nowadays, they're teaching us English as a foreign language." "That's his hang-up," replies Willie.

Shoving aside the question about which whitey (George Wallace? Marshall McLuhan?) said that blacks are nonverbal, the hang-up is everybody's in the sense that whites tacitly accept a certain form of written language as the proper medium for any grievance-redressing.

Whatever Sam Greenlee is doing in the ghetto now, maybe he is really looking for an alternative medium. There's something about the plot of his novel that makes one suspect that.

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